

REMARKS

Reconsideration is respectfully requested.

I. Status of the Claims

Claims 1, 3, 5, 11 and 13 - 19 are currently pending, with claims 2, 4, 6 - 10 and 12 having previously been canceled.

Applicants amend claims 1, 14 and 17. No new matter is added. Support for the amendments may be found, for example, with reference to Applicants' specification at page 23, line 23 through page 28, line 22, and with reference to Applicants' FIGs. 10 - 13.

II. Rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claims 1, 3, 5, 11 and 13 - 19 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,891,126 to Osborn, III et al. ("Osborn"). Applicants amend claims 1, 14 and 17 to further clarify the nature of their invention, and respectfully traverse the rejections of claims 1, 3, 5, 11 and 13 - 19 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a).

In amended independent claim 1, Applicants claim:

1. An interlabial pad with a size, weight, and flexibility capable of being held between labia by a part or the whole portion of the interlabial pad naturally therebetween, having a first axis that is substantially parallel to an anteroposterior axis of a wearer, and a second axis which is included in a horizontal plane when the wearer is standing and perpendicular to the first axis, comprising:

an absorbent body for absorbing body fluid, the absorbent body having a shape selected from the group consisting of elliptical-planar shapes, gourd-planar shapes and tear drop-planar shapes, the absorbent body having a plurality of bending elements each including a slit formed on a surface of the absorbent body, the bending elements each being provided in a prescribed position of the

absorbent body with a lower bending strength compared to positions other than the prescribed position;

a plurality of first bending element pieces, each first bending element piece extending for a first prescribed length in a direction that is substantially parallel with the first axis, and the plurality of first bending element pieces including:

- i) first bending element pieces having the slit positioned along the center line of the absorbent body in parallel with the first axis,
- (ii) first bending element pieces having the slit arranged to reach a first peripheral edge of the absorbent body, and
- (iii) first bending element pieces having the slit positioned between the center line of the absorbent body and a second peripheral edge of the absorbent body;

a plurality of second bending element pieces, each second bending element piece extending for a second prescribed length that is substantially parallel with the second axis, and the plurality of second bending element pieces including:

- i) second bending element pieces having the slit positioned to cross the center line of the absorbent body,
- (ii) second bending element pieces having the slit arranged to reach the [[a]] second peripheral edge of the absorbent body, and
- (iii) second bending element pieces having the slit positioned between the center line of the absorbent body and the second peripheral edge of the absorbent body; and

a covering material having a body side face facing a body side and an opposite side face facing away from the body side, the covering material enclosing [[encloses]] the absorbent body while maintaining an effect of the bending elements, the covering material defining a main form of the interlabial pad, wherein a surface of the covering material is not provided with slits,

wherein each of a plurality of first crossover points is formed from one of the plurality of first bending element pieces having the slit positioned along the center line and one of the plurality of second bending element pieces positioned to cross the center line, and each of a plurality of second crossover points is formed from one of the plurality of first bending element pieces having the slit positioned between the center line and the second peripheral edge and one of the plurality of second bending element pieces having the slit positioned between the center line of the absorbent body and the second peripheral edge of the absorbent body, and

wherein the absorbent body is folded in two along the centerline being at the first crossover points to form a long protrusion part so that portions of the opposite side face are positioned to face each other and extension parts extend laterally from the long protrusion part at the second crossover points.

(Emphasis added)

In other words, by providing bending elements comprising slits arranged in the claimed crossover point configuration, Applicants' claimed interlabial pad is effective to convert and effectively dissipate a downward compressive exerted by the vestibular floor in the vicinity of the bending elements having a crossover point configuration as a multidirectional compressive force directed away from the crossover points, thereby reducing discomfort as experienced by the wearer. Applicants respectfully submit that conversion of the applied compressive force into a multidirectional compressive force of lesser effect is a result achieved directly by the claimed crossover point configuration which is materially different from results achieved from any "general placement" of slits as bending elements on the interlabial pad. Applicants therefore further submit that the claimed crossover point configuration is a critical result effective variable that is neither taught nor suggested by Osborn.

For at least these reasons, Applicants respectfully submit that amended independent claim 1 is not anticipated or made obvious by Osborn, and stands in condition for allowance. As amended independent claim 17 claims a method of adjusting the form flexibility of an interlabial pad having bending elements configured in a crossing point configuration, Applicants submit that amended independent claim 17 is also allowable for at least these reasons.

Claims 3, 5, 11, and 13 - 16 and claims 18 and 19 respectively depend from allowable independent claims 1 and 17. For at least this reason, Applicants further submit that dependent claims 3, 5, 11, 13 - 16, 18 and 19 are also allowable.

Applicants therefore respectfully request that the rejections of claims 1, 3, 5, 11 and 13 - 19 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) be withdrawn.


CONCLUSION

In view of the above amendments, Applicants believe the pending application is in condition for allowance. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to pass this application to issue.

The Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number indicated below once he has reviewed the proposed amendment if the Examiner believes any issue can be resolved through either a Supplemental Response or an Examiner's Amendment.

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Respectfully submitted,

By  4/4528

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